

Hereford 'Boat-less' Rally, 13-14/10/18

Even named-storm Callum couldn't disrupt our SouthWest boat-less rally to Hereford! The amber warning extended just south of Hereford and the river Wye rose to alarming levels, completely flooding the riverside walk and almost flooding the Waterworks Museum which we visited on the second day. But, wind-blown and a little damp as may be, nothing dampened the spirits of the 28 members meeting in Hereford for this excellent rally.

Several of us started our weekend on the Friday evening with the event organisers, Bob and Ruth Keys, with an impromptu dinner at the Three Counties Hotel.

Late on Saturday morning, the remainder staying the whole weekend checked in to the hotel. Many of us then attempted to reach the Cathedral and old town centre by walking along the river bank. Quite senior, senior MOA members were seen clambering over walls and around flooded obstacles in an attempt to arrive dry shod at the Cathedral. Keith Bunker confidently assured his companions that his shoes would dry out very quickly!



The event started officially with a guided tour of the Cathedral, with our charming Welsh guide proudly explaining how her Welsh ancestors destroyed the original Saxon Cathedral on the same site, allowing the Normans a chance to show their brilliance in church building. Well, perhaps not quite that brilliant, since a fair proportion of the building fell down one Easter Monday a few hundred years later! Nonetheless this much repaired and improved Cathedral is one of Britain's finest. The one-hour tour took much longer, with so many fascinating stories needing

to be told, and was followed by a further amazing tour of the Mappa Mundi and the Chained Library. The Mappa Mundi is the early Medieval equivalent of the London Underground Map in that relative positions of the known world are roughly correct, but do not try to scale off distances or direction! Nicola Sturgeon must love the map's interpretation of the Scottish/English border with a channel separating the two countries more or less as wide as the English Channel to the south! Similarly, counterintuitive, the narrow width of the Mediterranean can be explained by the fact that travel by sea was much faster than travel overland, and time to travel a given distance was one of the factors used by the map maker to establish some sort of scale. Much enlightened, the Rally members found their way back to the hotel, this time avoiding the walk along the bank of the River Wye which by now was completely flooded!



Dinner was preceded by a talk on Old Gaffers by the Commodore of the Old Gaffers himself, Viv Head. I had the impression that most old gaffers, the ships rather than their skippers, travel very slowly but surely in any direction, but rather more quickly in the Bristol Channel when the tide allows. However, directional control appears to be lacking, given the story of how hard Viv thumped one of the famous cardinal buoys in the region. The Old Gaffers Association appears to comprise a lot of fascinating people dedicated to maintaining an

important part of our maritime history, for which I thank them every time I see one from the comfort of Maui 4!

At dinner we were able to welcome new and nearly-new members, old stalwarts and members from the far-flung reaches of the SW empire, anywhere between Portland Harbour and Neyland Marina (Pembrokeshire), with the odd outlier (Rob Barnfield) whose boat is still high-and-dry in Littlehampton. The room was warm, the food was variable, and the Craic was excellent, and promises were extracted from most present to support the SW for the joint AGM in Bristol in February (and I'm holding them to it!). I took the opportunity to demonstrate a working model of a Stirling cycle engine – in advance of the visit the following morning to the exhibits at the Waterworks museum. Normally the model works well on hot coffee, but this time we experimented with a combination of an ice-filled tumbler of water for the cold source, and John Oldham's fingers as the hot source – and the little machine fairly flew (albeit – backwards!).



Next morning saw most of us a short distance away over the flooded river valley at the aforementioned Waterworks Museum. Here a fair number of dedicated volunteers maintain working engines and pumps used in the past in local waterworks. There was a special exhibition of hot-air engines running on the Stirling Cycle, a thermodynamic principle first outlined by a Scottish cleric, the Reverend Stirling, in 1816 as a safer alternative to the steam

engine. We all enjoyed a conducted tour of the Museum, while keeping a weather eye on our cars as the River Wye encroached on the fringes of the car park. The Rally broke up gradually in the early afternoon, with most returning home after another excellent 2018 rally. Our thanks go especially to Bob and Ruth Keys for their faultless organisation of the event.

Tony Wildig